

**House Veterans Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Hearing
Education Benefits for National Guard & Reserve Members
Congressman Jim Matheson – Statement for the Record
March 21, 2007**

Thank you, Chairwoman Herseth and Ranking Member Boozman for holding this important hearing regarding education benefits for National Guardsmen and members of the Selected Reserve.

At a time when our nation and our military is increasingly relying upon Reservist contributions for extended periods of time, I don't think that we can overstate the importance of evaluating and improving key benefits such as educational assistance. There is no doubt in my mind that Congress should take a comprehensive look at the Montgomery GI Bill and look for ways to provide our soldiers with better benefits.

For my part, I have introduced legislation for the past three Congresses—the Resume Education After Defense Service Act, known as HR 1211 in this session—in order to address one problem with the current GI Bill.

Back in 2003, a group of Marine Corps Reservists from Utah came to me and asked for help. After two separate activations, including a tour in Iraq, these soldiers served 24 months on active duty in the Marine Corps. When they finally returned home, it was to find out that they fell under a loophole within the Montgomery GI Bill. They were ineligible for full active duty educational benefits because while they served the required 24 months on active duty, their months of service were not consecutive.

To me, this seemed like an unacceptable technicality—if our soldiers serve two full years on active duty, it shouldn't matter whether service is consecutive or cumulative. As you all know, under current operational cycles, many Reservists are activated for one year, demobilized for a year, then recalled—all but eliminating the opportunity to be on active duty for two consecutive years. We're even at a point where some Guardsmen and Reservists are doing their third and fourth tours in Iraq.

In order to address this problem, my legislation extends Title 38 Montgomery GI Bill benefits to Reservists and Guardsmen serving at least 24 months of cumulative active duty service over a 5-year period. It will apply to Reservists activated between 9/11 and the end of 2008, in order to accommodate those who are serving honorably in Afghanistan and Iraq. This bipartisan legislation had over 150 cosponsors in the last Congress and I recently reintroduced it with the support of 55 original cosponsors a couple weeks ago.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to today's hearing. I look forward to working with this committee in support of better educational benefits for Reservists and National Guardsmen.